I See Your Pain:

CULTIVATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED WORKPLACE

DATE: Friday, October 18, 2024
PRESENTED BY: Dr. Jaz Robbins | Licensed Psychologist & Board-Certified Nutritionist

AGENDA

- Defining "Intentionality"

- Demystifying Mindfulness

- Values Identification

- Self-maintenance

- Questions & Discussion

OBJECTIVES

- Describe the impact of trauma on the nervous system
- Explain 2 tenets of the trauma-informed lens

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

POSITIONALITY

Jaz Robbins, Psy.D., BCHN®
(she/her)

- Unpartnered African American Christian cis female
- Sister to two younger siblings; raised in poverty by a single mother (Deep South)
- Survivor of complex trauma
- Trauma-focused health psychologist and board-certified nutritionist
- Works from an integrated trauma-informed approach

MINDFUL PAUSE

Take a moment to recall one of your favorite food service establishments...

What makes it special?

"When you're inspired, it doesn't feel like work."

~Author Unknown

WHEN YOU FEEL SUPPORTED BY YOUR SUPERVISOR, YOUR DEPARTMENT, AND YOUR ORGANIZATION'S LEADERSHIP, YOU <u>WANT</u> TO PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD.

Your staff, team members, and department heads want the same things from their place of work that your patients are seeking from their providers.

Empathy | Judgement-free Interactions | Mutual Respect | Space for Me to Show Up as My Full Self | To be Heard & Listened To | To be Seen | Trust | Understanding

Trauma-informed Workplace

DEFINING "TRAUMA"

Context Is Key

- Lay speech
  - Used to describe everything from an annoying situation to one that led to deep emotional pain
- Medical professionals
  - A tissue injury that occurred due to violence or accident
- Mental health professionals
  - A pervasive emotional response to a terrible event

Mental Health: PTSD Criteria

- Big "T" Traumas
  - Required for a PTSD diagnosis
  - Major criteria
    - Actual or threatened death
    - Serious injury
    - Sexual violence
  - Big "T" contact
    - Direct exposure
    - Witnessed event
    - Learning that a relative or close friend was exposed
    - Repeated exposure thru work (vicarious)

Mental Health: PTSD Criteria

- Little "t" Traumas
  - Everything else
  - Far more subjective
- Any event, person, place, or thing that, as a result of a prior situation, left an emotional bruise or wound
  - Person adopts new behaviors as normative ways of operating, in an effort to heal acquired wounds

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Examples of Little 't' Traumas

- Aging parents
- Fear of blame
- Fears of flying
- Going to doctor's office
- Having a sick child
- Needles, vaccines, shots
- Phobias
- Received another bad review at work
- Relationship tension w spouse
- Places, things assoc w big Ts

Examples of Little 't' Traumas

- Academic rigor
- Bullying
- Don't fit in
- Fear of failure
- Financial tension
- Gun safety
- Lack of resources
- Lost/stolen items
- Separation anxiety
- Test anxiety
- Threat of violence
- Verbal altercations/disagreements

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Behavioral Adaptation

- I talk loudly and interrupt others bc no one ever listened to me growing up
  - This is my way of making certain I'm heard
- I rarely speak up during meetings bc I always got picked on in school when I had the wrong answer
  - This is my way of making certain I don't look stupid

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years)
- ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adolescence and adulthood
- ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential

~Centers for Disease Control

What Are the ACEs?

1. Did you feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect or take care of you?
2. Did you lose a parent through divorce, abandonment, death, or other reason?
3. Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide?
4. Did you live with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs, including prescription drugs?
5. Did your parents or adults in your home ever hit, punch, beat, or threaten to harm each other?
6. Did you live with anyone who went to jail or prison?
7. Did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?
8. Did a parent or adult in your home ever hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way?
9. Did you feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special?
10. Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or oral/anal/vaginal intercourse/penetration)?

ACEs: Long-term Impact

- ACE score of 4+
  - COPD risk .... 2.5xs greater
  - Hepatitis risk .... 2.5xs greater
  - Depression risk .... 4.5xs greater
  - Suicidality risk .... 12xs greater
- ACE score of 7+
  - Lung cancer risk .... 3xs greater
  - Ischemic heart disease risk .... 3.5xs greater
- "This is just bad behavior!"   WRONG
  - Significant research shows that exposure to early adversity has lasting effects on the developing brains and bodies of children

~Dr. Nadine Burke Harris

ACEs: Long-term Impact

- Nucleus accumbens
  - Pleasure and reward center of the brain that is implicated in substance dependence
- Prefrontal cortex
  - Necessary for impulse control and executive functioning
  - A critical area for learning
- Amygdala
  - Brain's fear response center
  - Measurable differences seen via MRI scans

For those of us with ACEs in our past, we carry their impact with us everywhere we go.

Sometimes your coworkers are interacting with your wounded younger self.
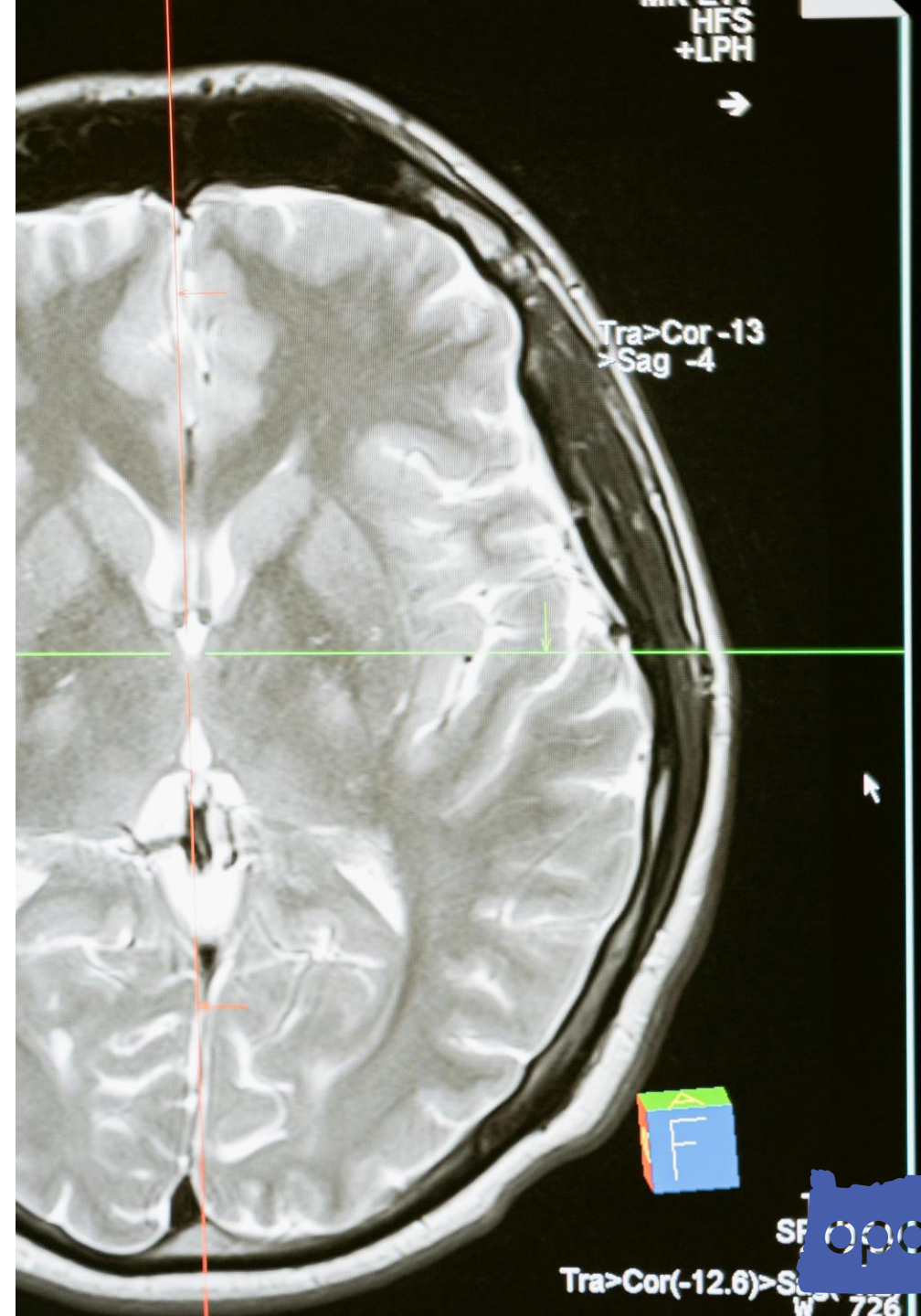
ACEs: Long-term Impact

Why bother with cultivating a trauma-informed workplace?

What does it matter?

Because everyone is showing up with emotional bruises of some kind.

When establishments take the effort to make their employees feel safe, employees are motivated to help patients feel safe.

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM IMPACT

Nervous System States

- Rest & Digest
  - Parasympathetic activation
  - Urge to connect w others
- Fight or Flight
  - Sympathetic activation
  - Urge to be hostile
- Freeze
  - Sympathetic over-activation
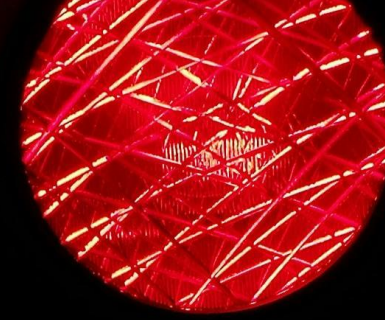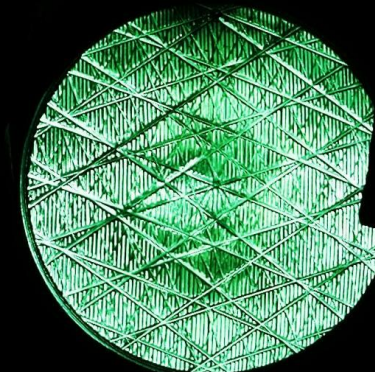 - Urge to disconnect

HIDE

THREAT

SAFE

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Exploring "Yellow Light"

- Reactions and somatic responses
  - Startle, jump
  - Scream
  - Hairs stand on back of neck
  - Become hyper-observant
  - Increased heart rate
  - Increased anxiety, fear
  - Increased perspiration
- These are innate, involuntary responses

THREAT

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The "Yellow Light" Impact

- Defensive

- Hard to detect safety

- Misread other ppl's cues
  - Confound difficult relationships

- Perceive ppl as threatening

- Novel environments may be perceived as dangerous

- Under-the-skin responses are NOT voluntary

THREAT

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A Soft Place to Land

- Cultivating a trauma-informed workplace
  - Gives all employees a soft place to land
  - Creates a sense of community and camaraderie
  - Develops individuals' passion for working toward a shared mission and goal
- Diffuses the
  - "It's not my problem."
  - "I don't get paid enough."

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CRAFTING A CULTURE

What Is "Organizational Culture"?

- Organizational culture constitutes the shared values, beliefs, attitudes, systems, and rules of any company, business, and/or organization

- These shared constructs define the personality and working environment of every department

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Impact of Organizational Culture

- Organizational culture influences how employees behave, and can also affect how consumers, vendors, and stakeholders experience the organization

- The culture can even determine the org's future direction

Every Person Plays a Part

- Organizational culture is created when employees, leaders, teams, and individuals work together toward a common goal

- Employees are influenced by the culture, but also shape and impact it

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Requires Intentionality

- When this is well-executed with mindful intention, the organization becomes a place that
    - Is exciting to work at
    - Is driven by a common vision
    - Is steered by employees on a mission
    - Just feels **different**

REX HOSPITAL | My Personal Experience

Photo Credit: RexHealthcare.com

Adopting a 'Team' Mindset

- Organizational culture only lives, breathes, and becomes contagious when each and every employee is fully committed

- The cultural mission functions as an ethical code by which all agree to adhere and abide

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WHY CREATE A TRAUMA-INFORMED WORKPLACE?

"Today, more and more workers are worried about making ends meet, dealing with chronic stress, and struggling to balance the demands of work and personal lives. The toll on their mental health is growing."

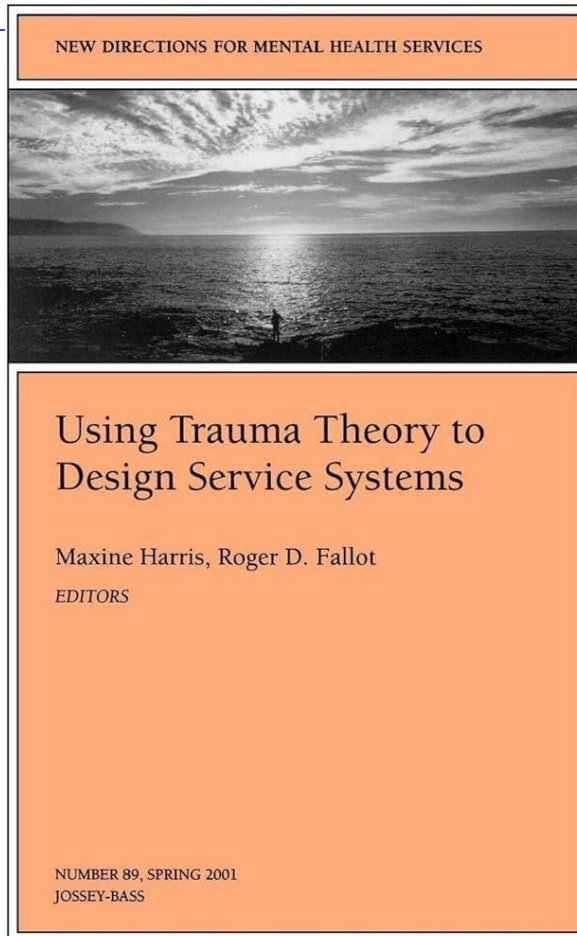~Vivek H. Murthy, M.D, MBA | Surgeon General of the United States

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EXPLORING TENETS OF THE TRAUMA-INFORMED LENS

Tenets of Trauma-informed Care

1. Safety
2. Trust
3. Choice
4. Collaboration
5. Empowerment
6. Cultural Humility

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Using Trauma Theory to Design Service Systems

Maxine Harris, Roger D. Fallot

EDITORS

NUMBER 89, SPRING 2001
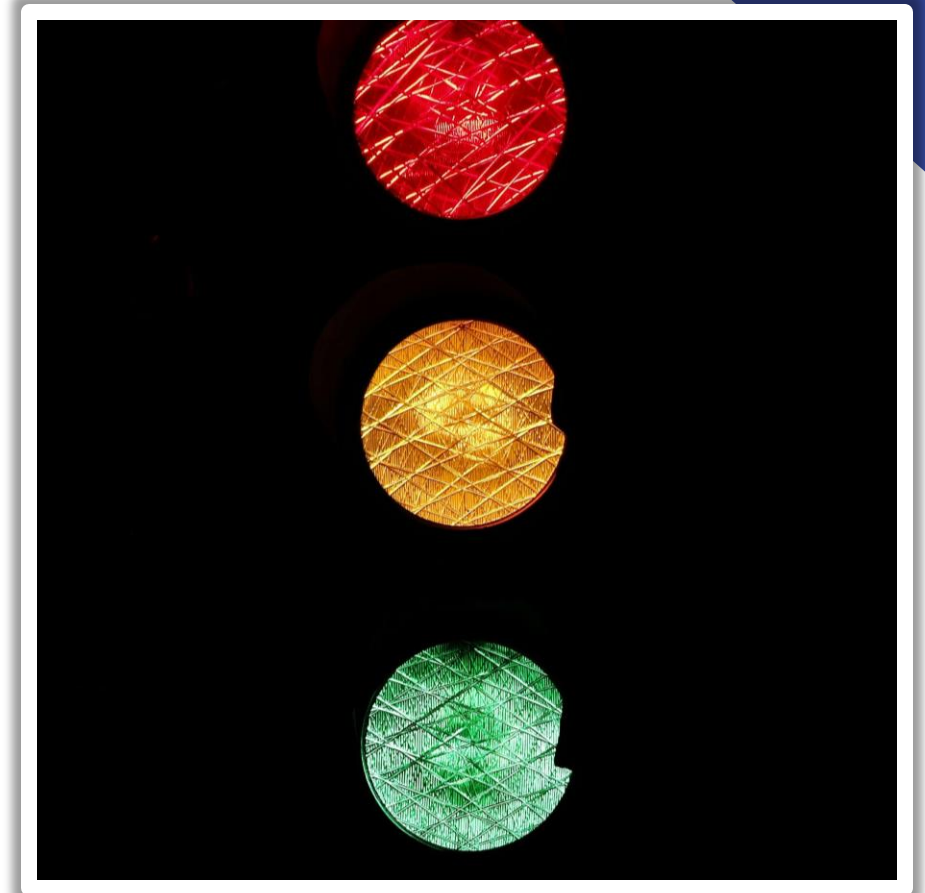JOSSEY-BASS

(Bailey et al., 2023; Lehrer 2021; Lewis et al., 2023)

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1.

Safety

Nervous System Response

- **Rest & Digest**
  - Parasympathetic activation
  - Urge to connect w others
- **Fight or Flight**
  - Sympathetic activation
  - Urge to be hostile
- **Freeze**
  - Sympathetic over-activation
  - Urge to disconnect

(Dana, 2018; Porges, 2003)

The body has **perceived** a threat and is responding accordingly.

Perception is Reality

- Whether the threat is real or imagined does not matter

- The body will respond as if it is real

- When a person has a history of big 'T' and/or little 't' traumas, their body's neural circuits become inaccurate in their ability to recognize the difference btwn actual vs. imaginary threats
  - Panic attacks, flashbacks, trauma reminders (T/t)
    - Similar sounds, faces, smells, places

(Dana, 2018; Porges, 2003)

On your mark!

"They took it the wrong way. I didn't mean it like that."

Your past is interacting w their past.

Cultivating Safety

- Do no harm
  - No physical harm
  - No verbal abuse
  - No emotional abuse
- Use your nervous system as a co-regulation tool
  - Be intentional w your voice
  - Be intentional w your words
  - Be intentional w your gestures
  - Be intentional w your body language
- Be deliberate in crafting safe environments
  - Welcoming colors
  - Welcoming furnishings
  - Welcoming staff
  - Welcoming reading material
  - Create a work environment that you are proud to come to and proud to be a part of
  - Work to counter the unchangeable components of the environment

2.

Trust

Bruises Destroy Trust

- Emotional bruises destroy trust
- These events send messages that ppl can't be trusted
- After being emotionally bruised, individuals fear
  - Opening up to another
  - Relying on another
  - Trusting another
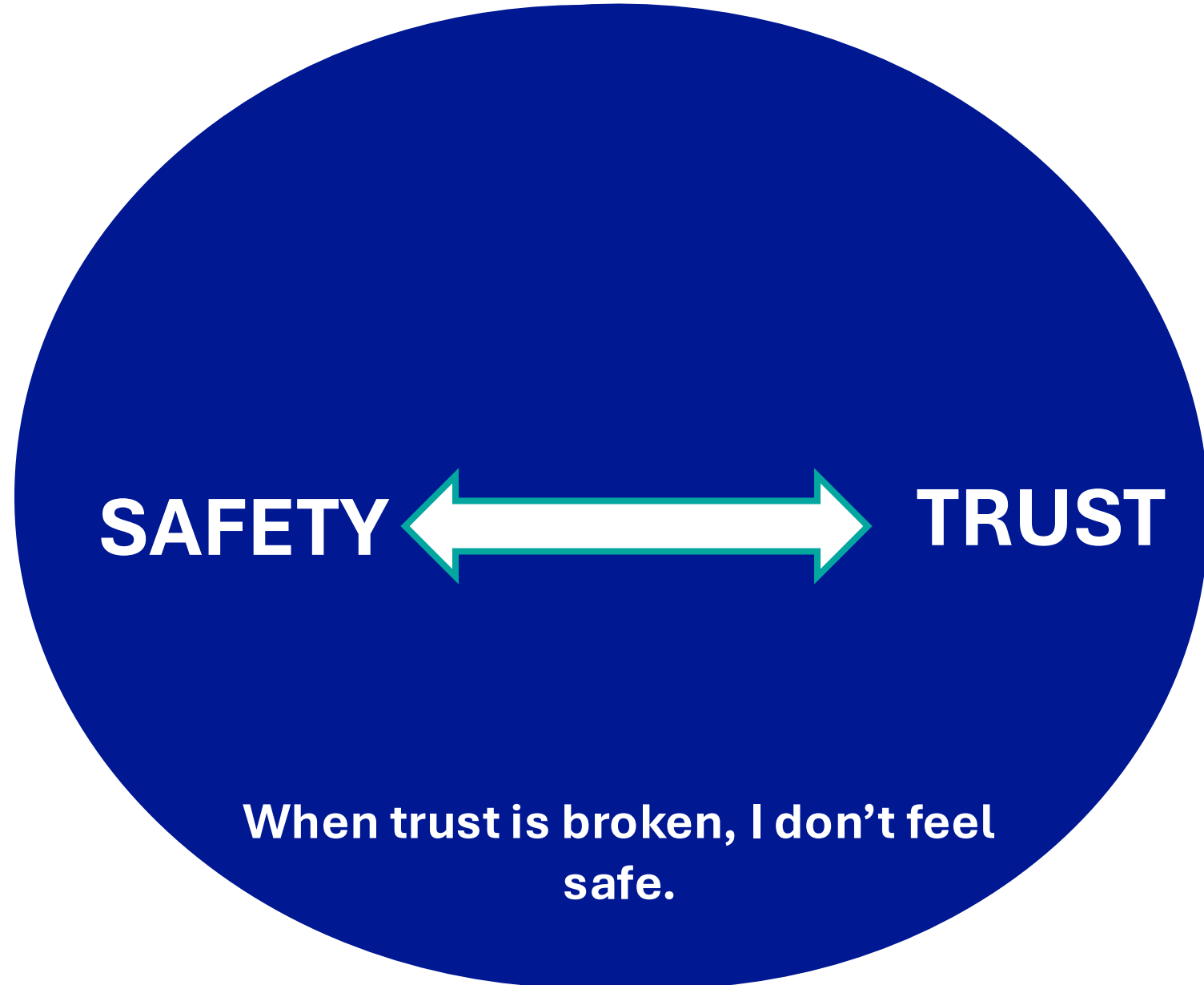 - Being vulnerable
- Belief: trust no one → safety

(Bryant-Davis, 2005)

Fraternal Twins

Fraternal Twins

SAFETY ⟷ **TRUST**

When trust is broken, I don't feel safe.
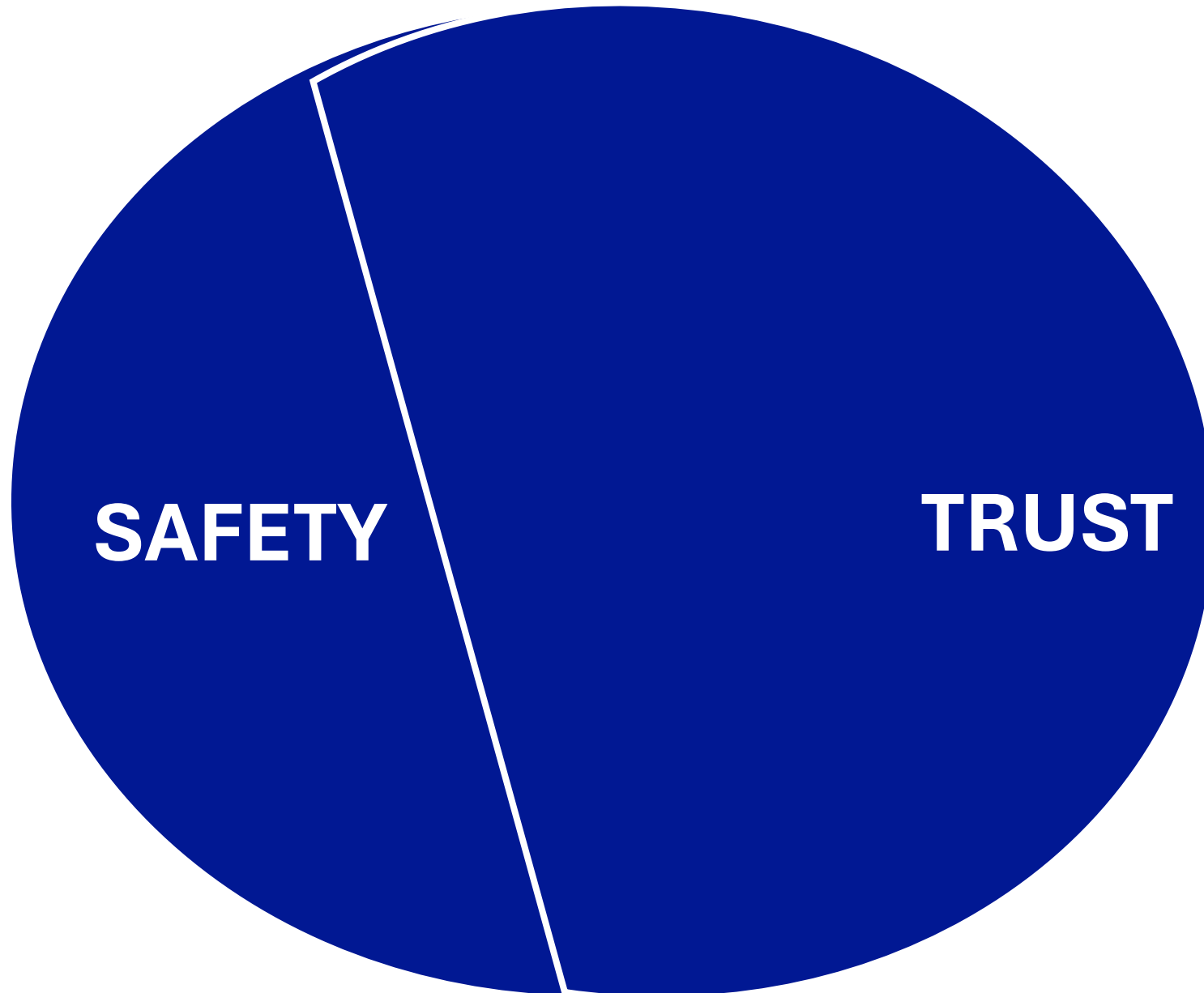
Without trust, the patient-provider relationship is weak, fragile, and easily destroyed as is the the supervisor-subordinate relationship.

Such a state dampens the team member's experience and makes it challenging for them to do their job effectively.

Neither the department, nor the team member ends up getting their needs met.

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Cultivating Trust

- CARING
  - Show empathy
  - Personalize your care
  - Share decision-making
- COMFORT
  - Maintain eye contact
  - Practice mirroring
  - Make team members feel "at home"
- COMMUNICATION
  - Facilitate open communication
  - Engage in active listening
  - Keep your word
  - Don't aim to "talk above" coworkers
- COMPETENCY
  - Identify and address training needs necessary to increase your expertise
  - Always work within your competence and refer on, or seek supervision/consultation, whenever necessary
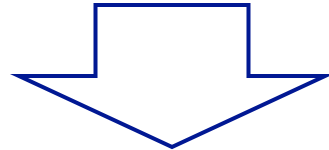 - Supervisors welcome questions

3.

Choice

Choice

- Regardless of how they present, events have taken place in your pt's life and in the lives of your team members, that left them feeling they had no choice and/or that aspects of their world are out of their control

External locus of control

Hopelessness

"Red light"

Choice

- In this state, patients and team members may hold the belief that
  - I will never heal
  - I will never feel like myself again
  - I will never experience joy (again)
  - This is just the way it is
  - There's no point
    - In trying
    - In asking for support

Cultivating Choice

- Lack of choice leads to employees feeling disconnected from employers and the organizational mission
- Choice gives team members a sense of control
- Choice gives individuals a sense of autonomy
- Information is the vehicle for Choice
  - Employees want to be informed
- Informed consent is an ongoing process
- Even when there is no choice, informed consent can increase employees' trust in their employer
- Transparency cultivates belief in the organization and increases one's desire to contribute to organizational goals

4.

Collaboration

Away From Authoritarianism

~ Merrian-Webster ~

THE ENFORCEMENT OR ADVOCACY OF STRICT OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY AT THE EXPENSE OF PERSONAL FREEDOM

- Heavy-handed leadership, oversight, and guidance
- "My way or the highway"
- "Do as I say, not as I do"

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Maintains Stress Response

- Authoritarianism mimics the dynamics of the emotional bruise

- Authoritarian bx keeps the individual's nervous system dysregulated and in a chronic stress response (<mark>yellow light</mark>)

- We know that a chronic yellow light state is detrimental to one's health as the stress response is stealing resources from other body systems

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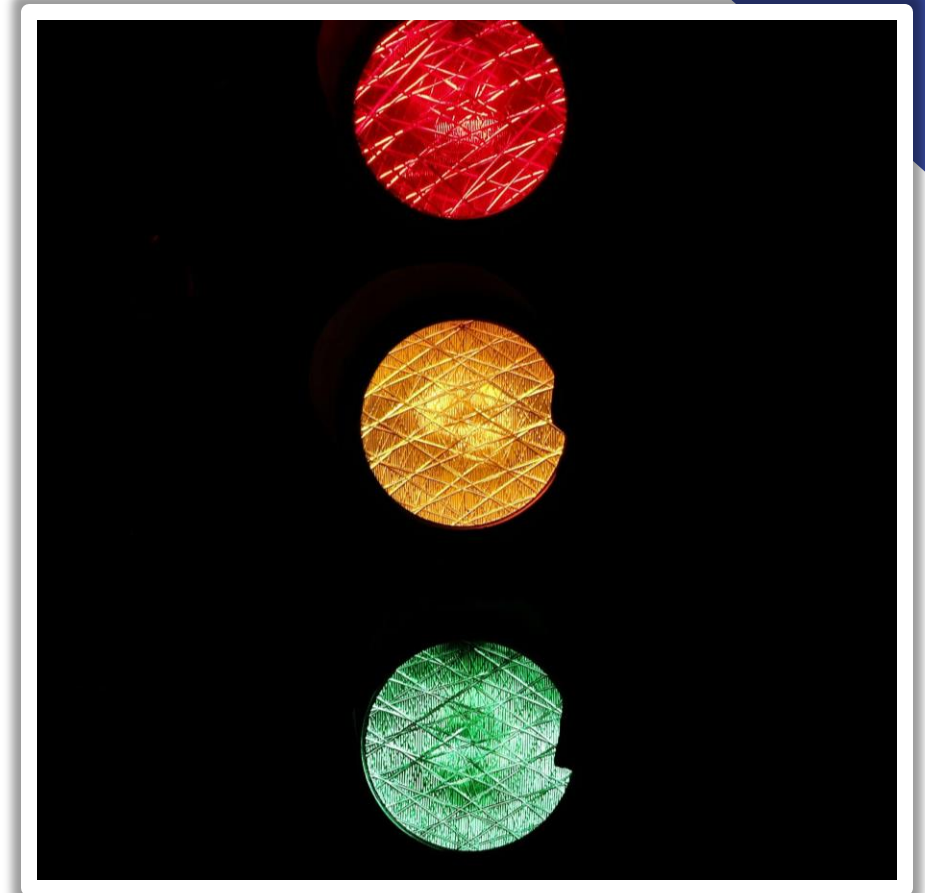
Cultivating Collaboration

- The vast majority of employees want to work in partnership w management
- Team members often have questions that go unasked for fear of being labeled as "difficult" or incompetent
- When team members don't feel safe w a superior, they will often acquiesce and give-in to the superior's wishes
- Safety and trust must be present in order for collaboration to blossom
- Create collaborative moments with purpose and intention
- Treat coworkers and team members like individuals—not like replaceable cogs
- Individuals must be willing to (and must feel welcomed to) collaborate w team members, w supervisors, and w other departments

5.

Empowerment

Powerless

~ **Merrian-Webster** ~

(a) DEVOID OF STRENGTH OR RESOURCES

(b) LACKING THE AUTHORITY OR CAPACITY TO ACT

Without agency or ability to speak for oneself, defend oneself, and/or request resources for oneself

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Most Socially Powerless

Who else?

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Effects of Powerless

- Can lead to feelings of
  - Frustration
  - Hopelessness
  - Diminished sense of self-worth
- When individuals perceive a lack of control over their lives and circumstances, it can be detrimental to their mental and emotional well-being

(Cantarero-Arevalo et al., 2024; Castro et al., 2016; Lindig et al., 2020)

The Important Equation

CHOICE **+** **COLLABORATION** **=** **EMPOWERMENT**

Photo Credit: Alliance for Fertility Preservation

Photo Credit: Mail Safi

Photo Credit: Indeed.com
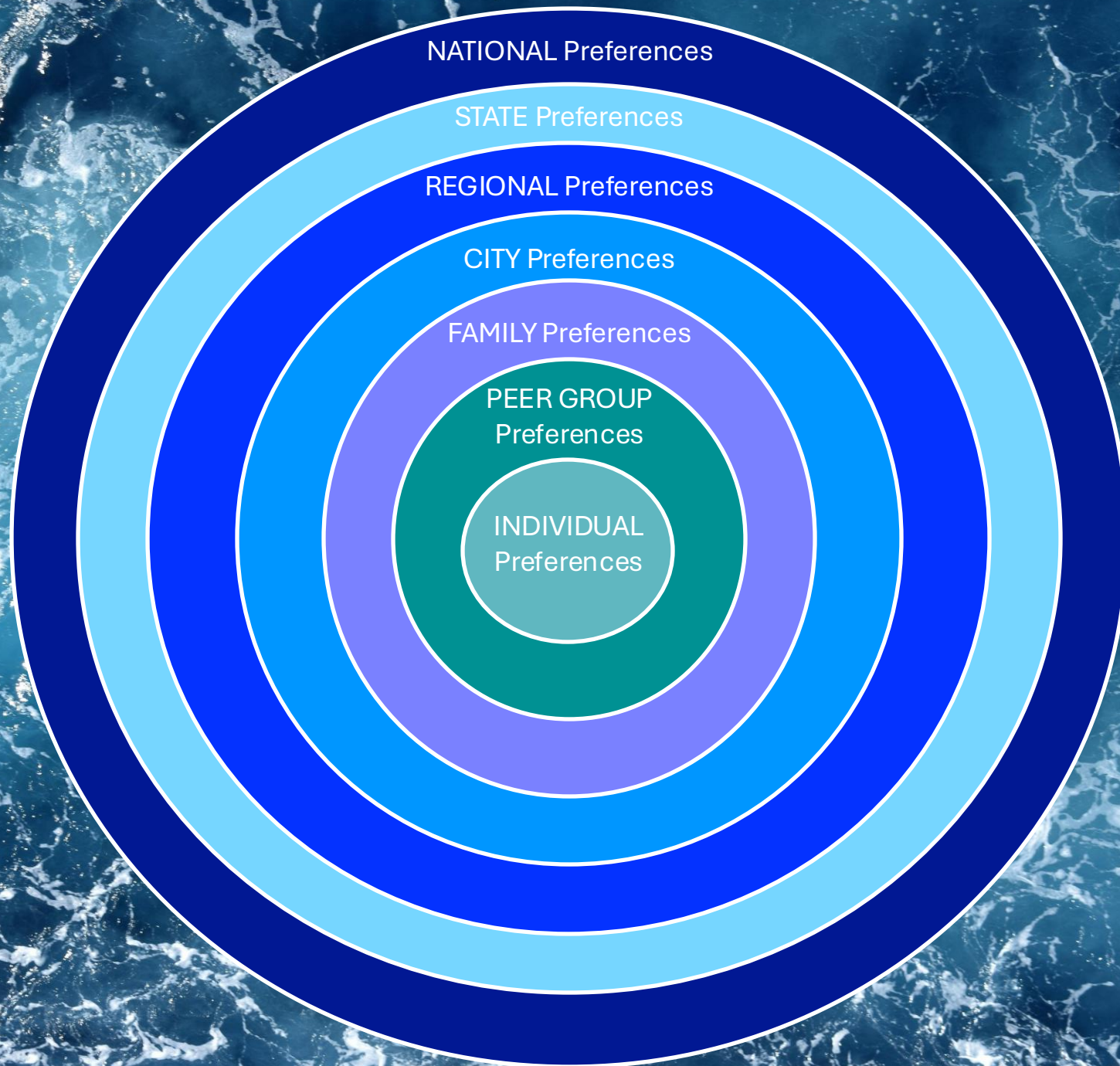
Cultivating Empowerment

Employees are loyal to organizations that give them a sense of empowerment.

- Employees want the information required to make educated decisions
- Staff members prefer to work with supervisors who welcome their questions, input, and discussion
- Employees want to be given information about the department and the larger organization
  - This makes them feel like a valued and necessary member of the team
- Team members want to feel supported by the leaders they work alongside
  - They want to believe that you genuinely care about their wellbeing
  - They want to trust that they are in good and capable hands

6.

Cultural Humility

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Culture is layered and complex.

NATIONAL Preferences

STATE Preferences

REGIONAL Preferences

CITY Preferences

FAMILY Preferences

PEER GROUP Preferences

INDIVIDUAL Preferences

A person's individual preferences are influenced by many things, and those preferences may change and fluctuate over time.

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A Call for Increased Understanding

- Allows folks to be seen **Beyond their demographics**
- Allows folks to be heard **Beyond their words**
- Allows folks to be understood **Based on their values**
- Creates a space where ppl feel like individuals as opposed to numbers
- Moves organizations away from the "insert employee here" mindset

Forces individuals to pause and get curious about the values living behind the words and actions

Modesty

- Cultural humility asks you to take a <mark>culturally modest</mark> approach to interpersonal interactions
  - Yes, you are a skilled professional
  - Yes, you are well educated
  - However, when it comes to truly knowing and recognizing the impact of someone else's lived experience...

...that person is the expert.

Do your best to avoid assumptions.

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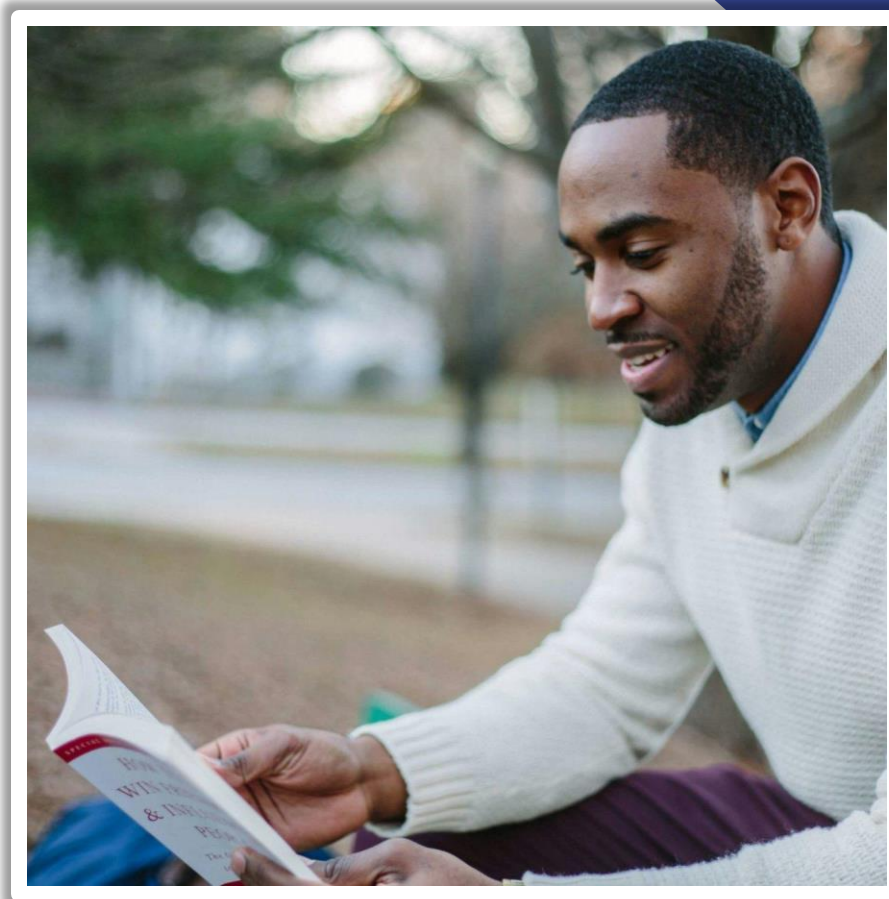
Benefits of Cultural Humility

- Softens the impact of negative interpersonal exchanges that may occur in workplace interactions

- Associated w decreased frequency of racial microaggressions, and decreased severity of impact when they do occur

(DeBlaere et al, 2023; Hook et al. 2016; Mosher et al., 2017)

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Benefits of Cultural Humility

- Improved supervisory relationships
  - Culturally humble supervisors exhibit increased cultural mindfulness
  - Increased likelihood of noticing a cultural rupture in supervisory relationship
  - Increased motivation to repair said rupture

(Watkins et al., 2018)

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Cultivating Cultural Humility

- Requires a willingness to engage in lifelong learning
- Holds the stance that "I am not all-knowing"
- When delivered w consistency
  - Decrease negative impact of interpersonal hiccups and microaggressions
  - Improved supervisory relationships
  - Improved departmental morale
- Ongoing reflection
  - Impact of oppressive systems
- Know your blind spots
  - Informed by your beliefs & values
- Avoid assumptions
  - Pause to consider other possibilities
- Invite teammates' expertise
  - Ask clarifying questions

Shifting Perspective

What happened to you?

What might I be missing?

What might my coworker be dealing with?

Am I showing up as my best self?

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TYPES OF VACA

A week just to s

A week to deep

A week I don't s

A week where I
I don't have to

A week where I
make any decis

A week where I
any laundry.

Uncle Ari

Follow

I have never come back from any holiday feeling relaxed, refreshed & reinvigorated to get back into work.

I come back with the taste of freedom, still fresh in my mouth, a renewed hatred for work, and a strong suspicion that this is not what I should be spending my life doing.

get 4/5 hours
ng to prepare
ork again... feels

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"Trauma-informed workplaces offer a sanctuary of safety and support, a place where people can bring their whole selves and be valued for who they are."

~Sandra L. Bloom, M.D. | Board Certified Psychiatrist

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When we treat our subordinates and teammates with the same mutual respect that our patients seek from us, the workplace becomes a sanctuary where employees take initiative and look for ways to help the organization reach its larger goals.

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THAT'S the workplace environment that outsiders enter and leave feeling, "I like it there. Everyone there felt like they enjoyed their jobs."

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QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

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